



Success Story

Haul-In Policy Better for Practice Efficiency and Patient Care

As Dr. Ginger Reagan's practice in Wilmington, N.C., grew and its coverage radius expanded, she and her staff at Reagan Equine found it increasingly difficult to provide emergency coverage for all of their clients, especially those at the edge of the practice's range.

"If you're an hour and 15 minutes away from us to the north, that's actually two-and-a-half hours from our southernmost client," explained Dr. Reagan, who opened Reagan Equine in 2005. "We have three veterinarians and an intern. It was inefficient with our staff time and our ability to manage resources, people, and equipment, even quite apart from the work/life balance aspect. There just was no way we could go out for every emergency."

The solution? Ask clients to bring their horses to the Reagan Equine clinic instead.

Better for Business and Care

Bringing horses to the clinic expands the services and treatments available for emergency cases, reduces travel time and costs for hourly techs, and makes it easier to quickly call in additional support when multiple emergencies hit at once.

"The haul-in policy hasn't cost us anything, and it's more efficient," said Dr. Reagan. "It's made our work lives so much better."

Reagan Equine didn't set out to establish a haul-in policy, Dr. Reagan said. The program came about out of necessity. "There were times when we'd told people to bring their horse and meet us at the clinic because we were 45 minutes away from the clinic and they were an hour away in the opposite direction," Dr. Reagan explained. "That's how the policy started to grow: people knew they could get their horses seen quicker if they were meeting us halfway."

"It became a word-of-mouth situation," added associate veterinarian Dr. Lindsay Arthur. "And after someone has one experience hauling in, they tend to continue hauling in."

How It Works

The haul-in program has since become a more formalized policy. "When we started taking new clients, if they were a long way out, we told them they would need to be haul-in-only clients so they knew that up front," Dr. Reagan explained. "Some are just haul-ins for emergencies."

"There are a couple of areas that are an hour away that we routinely get to about every other week, so people in those areas don't have to be strict haul-ins," added Dr. Arthur. "But if it's an area we're not already servicing, then the likelihood is lower that we're going to get out there for routine stuff." Horse owners who haul in avoid a farm-call charge, though emergencies still incur an emergency fee.



"Typically, when I'm on call, I say, 'I can meet you at the clinic, you need to bring the horse in,' and most of them come," Dr. Reagan said.

If the horse is down or physically unable to be hauled, Reagan Equine veterinarians will drive to an emergency. For clients who do not have access to emergency hauling, the clinic also can, at a veterinarian's discretion, send out its own truck and trailer, though it does not advertise the service. Dr. Reagan estimated about 15% of emergency cases come in via clinic transport.

Haul-in clients quickly come to appreciate that their horses will be seen faster in an emergency, will have immediate access to all of the clinic's on-site resources, and can be monitored overnight at the clinic if required. Haul-ins also give the on-call veterinarian time to prepare for the arrival, which reduces the stress of rushing to a call.

Treating horses at the clinic, where good lighting, equipment, and assistance is available is also safer, Dr. Reagan noted.

Educating Clients

With relatively few emergency providers in the area, Reagan Equine's client buy-in has been good without the need for additional incentives, like discounts for haul-ins. "The biggest thing is to set the standard for haul-in ahead of time," Dr. Reagan advised.

Reagan Equine also uses client conversations, the clinic's blog, and a Facebook page to promote the importance of having an emergency plan in general, including access to hauling. Those provide additional opportunities to establish a standard of hauling horses to the clinic for emergency care.

"It helps to emphasize the standard of care they can get in a veterinary facility versus out on the farm," Dr. Arthur said. "For haul-ins, it's a better standard of care and better for the horse all around."